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DOI:

[10.1080/02619768.2018.1544613](https://doi.org/10.1080/02619768.2018.1544613)

Document Version

Peer reviewed version

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Citation for published version (APA):

George, R., & Maguire, M. (2019). Choice and Diversity in English Initial Teacher Education (ITE): Trainees' Perspectives. *European Journal Of Teacher Education*, 42(1), 19-35.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/02619768.2018.1544613>

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Choice and Diversity in English Initial Teacher Education (ITE): Trainees' Perspectives

Abstract

In England, there has been an expansion of different routes into teaching resulting in an increasingly complex and diverse pattern of training provision. This reconfiguration of becoming a teacher is driven by concerns to improve the quality of teachers who are better able to raise standards in schools as well as to ensure a regular supply of teachers for the nation's children. In consequence, there has been a move towards more school-based and school-led programmes set in a market-driven approach to pre-service teacher preparation. A great deal of research has focused on the implications of these structural changes in English teacher education, while much less attention has been paid to the perceptions and experiences of those who enrol on these diverse teacher education programmes.

This paper draws on a series of in-depth interviews with twelve trainee teachers following some of the different pathways into teaching in secondary schools. It explores the trainees' rationale for choosing their route and how they describe the advantages and disadvantages of their chosen pathways. The intention is to foreground *the voices of trainee teachers who have a powerful stake in this provision*.

Key Words: Teacher Education, Trainee Teachers, Choice and Diversity.

Choice and Diversity in English Initial Teacher Education (ITE): Trainees' Perspectives

Reforming initial teacher education – an international challenge

Around the globe, raising teacher quality is seen as central to improving education provision in schools and this is reflected in the increasing policy interventions into pre-service teacher education (Tatto 2006). In her 2005 Presidential Address to the American Education Research Association, Cochran-Smith argued that the reforms that were starting to emerge were 'qualitatively different from previous calls for improvement' (p. 4). She claimed that concerns about attainment gaps and the influence of a market-led approach in education were shaping the construction of what she called 'new teacher education'. While she was writing mainly about the US context, she argued that all nation states were grappling with similar 'challenges' in initial teacher education. Many nations, aware of international comparisons and international league tables, such as TIMSS and PISA, have attempted to reform their teacher education provision in order to raise measurable outcomes for their students (Sellar and Lingard, 2014). According to Cochran-Smith (2005), there is now a widespread belief that the right policies, drawn from empirical evidence about what works, can resolve the challenges that exist. Teacher education is now recognised as being a 'wicked' policy problem and is highly susceptible to reforming interventions.

While teacher reform movements concentrate on raising quality through specifying core skills and standards or competencies that have to be demonstrated, there is a second imperative for change that is evident in many national settings and that is the equally 'wicked' policy problem of the shortage of teachers (Labaree, 2010; Kelchtermans, 2017). As Cochrane-Smith (2005: 6) argues:

The implementation of appropriate policies regarding teacher education will solve the teacher supply problem and enhance the quality of the teachers being prepared for the nation's schools, thus leading to desired school outcomes, especially pupil's outcomes.

One response has been the development of a variety of tracks into teaching that recruit from different cohorts; for example, recruiting highly qualified graduates from prestigious universities as with the Teach for America (TfA) programme that has been adopted in many nation states including England's Teach First (Ellis et al., 2016), and recruiting ex-service people with experience of leading others (Foster, 2018). Another reform has been to situate teacher education in schools so that intending teachers can 'learn on the job', filling a vacant post, while earning a salary. There are additional pressures for reform including long-standing debates about what sort of knowledge is needed by intending teachers and the place of evidence-based research in initial teacher education (ITE). There are also recurring questions about who should lead this provision and where it should be based, in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) or in schools. In sum, as Fraser (2007: 1) claims, there is now an international reform movement where nation states are involved in 'restructuring their teacher education programs, closing some, opening others and radically changing most'.

Initial Teacher Education (ITE) policy and practice in England

Turning now to the English context, ITE has experienced a long and complex history of policy reforms (Murray and Wishart, 2011; Furlong, 2013). McIntyre, et al., (2017: 1) describe ITE as being a site of 'persistent turbulence for the last thirty years'. More changes in ITE initiated by the Conservative Coalition Government (2010-2015) have been extended by the Conservative administration (2015 onwards). These reforms include the advocacy of consumer choice and an increase in alternative 'providers', a move that reflects Cochran-Smith's 'new teacher education'. Simultaneously, there has been a return to debates about the purpose and nature of teaching (Winch, 2017) and many of the current reforms to ITE provision have been characterised as a 'turn to the practical' (Beauchamp, et al., 2013). Murray and Mutton (2016: 72) describe a 'pendulum swing... mov(ing) further away from the dominance of HEIs and towards schools and teachers... driven by central government interventions'. Brown et al., (2016:5) argue that these

shifts have 'altered the balance of power between universities and schools, and in turn, their relationship with one another' (Brown et al., 2016:5). Like Cochran-Smith (2005), Mutton and Murray (2016) claim that these changes started some time ago. What is different now, they argue, is that the pace of change in English ITE reform has accelerated in the last decade.

According to McIntyre, et al (2017) the publication of the White Paper, 'The Importance of Teaching' in 2010, 'heralded arguably the most radical policy changes between 2010 and 2015'. These radical changes were and are part of a 'reconfiguring of the school system in ways that reflect a complex fusion of neoliberal and neoconservative policy agendas' (p. 13). The 'good' teacher is being reconstructed through a concentration on competences and skills at the expense of any 'cultural critique' or of seeing education as an intellectual discipline (see also Cochran-Smith, 2005; Connell, 2009; Maguire, 2014). In a search for so-called 'world class' education, the White Paper marked a break with the traditional university – school pattern of teacher education. The then Secretary of State for Education, Michael Gove argued that 'Teaching is a craft and it is best learnt as an apprentice observing a master craftsman or woman' in school (Gove 2010) – a provocative claim that has significantly disrupted and fragmented provision since this time.

Rather than detailing the myriad small steps and larger strategies that pattern teacher education reform in England more fully (but see The Teacher Education Group, 2016; Clarke and Phelan, 2017) we want to concentrate on the ideological underpinnings of current legislation and policy movements in England. In a context of alleged 'crisis' and 'failure' it has been alleged that a market model will deliver what is needed to ensure success through waste-cutting and innovative reforms (Howson and McNamara, 2012). In order to provide consumer choice in ITE (where the consumer is the intending teacher and school and not the student/child in the classroom) there has to be diversity, choice and competition in the market place of teacher training. This diversity and choice (or fragmentation and incoherence) is provided through the variety of routes into teaching. Flexibility is promoted through the different

entry requirements to different pathways that are designed to encourage additional recruits who might otherwise not have considered teaching as a career. In the marketplace of English ITE there is now a complex amalgam of choice, competition, deregulation and flexibility.

In their topography of the different pathways into teaching that exist in England, Whiting et al (2016: 9) have documented what they describe as 'an ever more complex patchwork of provision'. They list pathways that are provider-led by schools and HEIs; they document routes such as Teach First (an internship model based on TfA), Troops to Teachers and programmes like Researchers in Schools (a post-doctoral recruitment programme). They also list the various Academy School chains and third sector providers of teacher education (school-led programmes) some of which are very small indeed. There are larger undergraduate routes and Postgraduate Certificate of Education (PGCE) programmes as well as employment-based pathways in schools that also carry academic qualifications up to Masters level. In partnership with HEIs, many of the school-based pathways offer the PGCE qualification (Foster, 2018). There is diversity of provision and a complex interplay between marketisation and workforce planning that has arguably led to what Howson and McNamara (2012: 184) have described as 'oversupply and shortages' in some schools and in some parts of the country.

In a nutshell, recent teacher education policy reform in England has been framed around the argument that teachers are best prepared for their job in the classroom and there has been a privileging of school-based pathways that 'have been promoted aggressively' by various government administrations (McIntyre et al, 2017: 12). As McIntyre et al. argue, multiple pathways into teaching may erode a sense of a community of practitioners and some routes may possibly contribute towards a hierarchy in training pathways (Ellis, et al., 2016). Another outcome may be that teachers may feel that they are joining an organization (their school) rather than a professional occupation (McIntyre, et al., 2017: 12). Other concerns have been expressed; will learning on the job valorise experiential learning and side-line any more theoretical

questions? Will the training schools be preparing teachers for all schools and all children, or just for their own? (Maguire, 2014).

One of the bottom line pressures for the English HEI sector has been a reduction in funding because of these reforms and the transfer of government funding away from 'traditional' providers towards schools and third sector groups. This transfer has been determined by the government's control and allocation of ITE places and student numbers to the different pathways into teaching. This monetary shift is complex and in flux. So, while we do not have enough space to describe this shift in detail (but see Allen, et al, 2016), some traditional HEI providers have had to withdraw from ITE as it has no longer been financially viable to maintain their involvement. Newer providers have moved into the ITE marketplace, inserting more competition and diversity and, ironically, sometimes at a higher cost than their traditional HEI-based 'rivals'. At the same time, intending teachers now take responsibility for their own training costs although there are a wide range of bursaries, scholarships, salaried training routes and tuition fees and maintenance loans available (UCAS, 2017).

There is also a more pragmatic influence on ITE policy in England; that is, intermittent teacher shortages (in numbers retained rather than recruited, and in specialist subject areas in the secondary school curriculum, as well as in 'challenging' schools serving disadvantaged communities). These recruitment and retention pressures have had outcomes in the alternative certification of teachers that is underway in many nation states (Friedrich, 2014). In England, until relatively recently, teaching has not always been a popular post-graduate occupation with less competitive salaries and poorer work conditions limiting recruitment. Even when the salaries have improved, teacher turnover is still high, with many teachers claiming that the workload is excessive and then leaving the profession (Marsh, 2015; DfE, 2017). Supply and demand continue to be a challenge for teacher education recruitment and retention in England as elsewhere (Baker-Doyle, 2010).

We do not want to suggest that there has been a 'golden age' in teacher education policy and practice in England; that is certainly not the case. One problem with some of the older traditional HEI-based routes into teaching was that they treated all trainees as if they had the same experiences, backgrounds and home circumstances. Thus, many eligible would-be teachers were not able to undertake an ITE programme that was based in a University and that frequently required them to study full-time. The diversity in routes that recognises the experiences of those who select teaching as a second or third career choice, who may already have substantial but unqualified teaching experience, who may need to earn while they learn, has offered a pathway into a professional occupation that might, at earlier points in time have seemed closed to these applicants. For example, Teach First recruits applicants from 'good' universities, and claims to have brought top flight graduates into the teaching profession who previously would not have considered teaching as a suitable occupation (Hutchings, et al., 2006). As Ofsted have noted, the introduction of more routes into teaching is 'one of the success stories of recent years' (Ofsted, 2012). But as Brown, et al. have suggested, there is some concern that in some of these new pathways, theory and analysis have been displaced by a concentration on practice.

University and school-based teacher educators are aware, to differing degrees, of how this situation affects trainees' conceptions of how to teach. Those in different locations also hold differing beliefs and enact various understandings of ideal notions of breadth and type of professional experience (Brown et al., 2016:5).

In sum, a great deal of research attention around policy reforms in English ITE has concentrated on the changing relationships between the traditional HEI providers of teacher education and schools as well as an alleged move away from critical theoretical issues towards practical classroom concerns in the different pathways. In consequence, much less attention has been paid to the

perceptions and experiences of those most directly affected by these policy changes in pre-service teacher training in England, arguably the trainee teachers themselves who, borrowing from Ball et al., 2012:63) would be seen as policy 'receivers'. That is, they are on the receiving end of all this policy reforming and are only positioned as 'choosers' of different pathways into teaching. Rather than dealing more fully with details of policy and points of specificity such as the move to school-led ITE (but see Jackson and Burch, 2016; Mutton et al., 2017) the focus of this paper deals with a much less researched aspect of these reforms; that is the trainee teachers' perspectives.

Study and Methods

In England, a number of studies have explored the contribution and some of the complexities of the more traditional university routes (Beck, 2008; Furlong et al., 2009; Ellis, 2010). Other researchers have concentrated on some of the alternative routes into certification (Mujis, et al., 2010) and some research teams have looked at the impact of wider political and economic changes on the sector (Furlong, 2013; Horden, 2014; Murray and Mutton, 2016).

Researchers have also looked at the impact of reforming moves in terms of the work of teacher educators (Ellis, et al. 2013). Yet, to date, not much is known about the choice making processes of current trainee teachers and their reasons for selecting particular routes into teaching. Little is known about how they perceive and describe the advantages and disadvantages of their chosen pathways. What are their experiences of these different routes (excluding Teach First and some of the smaller programmes) that are currently available in England?

Our small-scale, exploratory qualitative study was constructed to start to chart and explore the perceptions and experiences of trainee teachers on the three overlapping and dominant routes into secondary school teaching in England. The three pathways we were interested in are similar in content and design, the main difference being the relationships between the schools and the HEI in the different pathways. First, the PGCE; this is a university based course

and lasts a university's academic year i.e. late September through to June, where the trainees' time is split between the university and school. PGCE trainees are selected by the university and usually have two school placements. Second, School Direct Salaried (SDS); this is a school-led route lasting from the beginning of September through until the end of July, reflecting the school year and not the University year. This pathway takes place almost exclusively in the school and provides on-the-job training. School Direct Salaried Trainees are selected by the school and at the end of their course are awarded Qualified Teacher Status (sometimes ratified as a PGCE). These students are paid a salary and are often seen as employees of the school. Last, School Direct Unsalaries (SDU) this route is also an academic year in length. Schools offering School Direct Unsalaries (SDU) pathways into qualified teacher status (QTS) may offer their trainees a full PGCE programme delivered by the HEI that they are partnering with. (This is the case with the two HEIs where the sample for this paper are located).

In our project our focus was with the trainee's perspectives rather than exploring details of programme design or assessment procedures for example, unless our participants specifically raised these issues. Our sample was drawn from two institutions of Higher Education located in London that were involved with these three pathways (see Table 1.). All the trainees were preparing to teach in secondary schools and they all held a first degree in the subject area in which they were training to teach. Trainees were recruited to this project in different ways. In one institution, trainees were invited to participate through an email sent to the whole cohort. In the second institution, the full cohort was asked to complete a short survey detailing their subjects, pathways and whether they were interested in participating in interviews. Interviewees were selected at random to represent the different pathways. All participants were made aware of the purposes of this small-scale study and gave their informed consent to participation; all participants' names and schools have been anonymised.

There can be ethical tensions where the more powerful conduct interviews

with those deemed to be less powerful (Ritchie, 2006). It could be argued that we, as university lecturers, may have held a bias towards university-based programmes and that a perception that this was the case may have influenced what trainees said in their interviews. However, the interview data indicated that our participants were agentic, well informed and generally enthusiastic advocates for their chosen routes.

There are methodological concerns involved in producing work from a small number of in-depth interviews; here we briefly consider one of the most salient issues. Although the sample is small, so too is our purpose in this article. What we want to do is to start to explore what trainee experiences have to tell us about their perceptions and their experiences of diversity in pathways into teaching. Sikes (2000, 263) argues that small samples can highlight and value the 'subjective, emic and ideographic' and in what follows we explore the situated experiences and subjective perceptions of a small number of secondary school trainee teachers.

Table 1. Participants (goes here)

We conducted twelve in-depth semi-structured interviews that lasted between forty-five minutes and an hour and a half. The interviews covered a range of questions concerned with our participants' reasons for becoming teachers; what they did to explore available routes (their choosing), their previous contacts with schools, if they had any, as well as their experiences on their route. The interviews were structured round these topics but there was sufficient flexibility and time available for our participants to raise any of their own questions and concerns (Seidman, 2013). The interviews were conducted towards the end of their final school placement, which was also towards the end of their programme, and all of our participants were expecting to qualify and move into full time teaching in the following year. The interviews were carried out by the authors of this paper, who had both been teachers earlier on in their careers. All of the interviews were professionally transcribed

and fully analysed. The transcripts were open-coded and segments of data were grouped together according to the themes that emerged from this process (Huberman and Miles, 1998). Initially, the interviews were coded individually in order to assure reliability in the data analysis process. When we brought the coding and analysis together, the dominant themes that we now report, were evident in both sets of initial analyses. In what follows, we detail and discuss our participants' reasons for choosing their route into teaching and their experiences of their programme.

Choosing a pathway

In laying out our participant's reasons for choosing their routes we start with some of their practical, contextualised choosing drivers; where you live plays a part in where you choose to study and issues of access and cost have to be factored into any calculations. Some of our participants' reasons for choosing were to do with accessibility, with issues related to housing and transport being very influential. In a large and expensive city like London, these sorts of factors can constrain occupational choice-making for many people, not just teachers. Those who were applying through the School Direct Routes (salaried and unsalaried) had more capacity to choose than their PGCE peers on the University programmes. An important part of their application involved applying to a particular school or group of schools – which meant they could directly choose their location and the area in which they would be undertaking their school placement. This pathway choice is extremely attractive in terms of practical issues of manageability. PGCE trainees, on the other hand, are offered places in schools where their Institution has partnerships and thus they have less capacity to exercise choice in the same way as their School Direct peers.

And I could walk there, I could walk to school, it takes me twenty minutes from my flat. (Susan, SDU)

It was in an area that I knew so I didn't have to worry over little things like where will I park, things like that that stress you out in the first week or two, like I knew that already because that was the area that I'd grown up in as well. (Jean, SDU)

For some of our SD trainees, other key drivers for their choice related to labour market pressures, occupational security and future prospects. Some trainees had experienced precarious and insecure work and were now turning to an occupation that they thought presented security as well as an opportunity for advancement in a professional and structured career. These reasons were also part of why other trainees chose teaching as an occupation regardless of the pathway selected. However, when coupled with the prospect of a salary while undertaking training, as two respondents volunteered, 'It's a no-brainer' (Laura and Claudine).

... in France because it's a crisis so they give you a short contract and then they do it again and again and then they never give you like a long-term one. So I'd had enough ... So I went on UCAS, did my, you know, like hundreds of words to explain what you're doing, asked two references, put your degrees and all that. And then they ask you if you want to be salaried or not. Well obviously! (Claudine, SDS)

Yeah. I mean, the money is a factor because you're used to working. I mean, a lot of these students have just completed their degree and they've gone into a PGCE one-year, which is for them, Whereas me, I'm 28, I've gone into work for three or four years, I can't imagine going back into university and not working for a year. You know, I've got things to pay off. (Saif, SDS)

Others chose their pathway for reasons of the status and prestige they thought would accrue to them after the successful completion of their programme.

And then I was looking at all the providers. And, really, I wanted to go to Benedicts. I had in my mind that Benedicts was the place, because it's got such, well, it's such a prestigious kind of place and I was like very...I was thrilledwell, it's like one of those institutions that everyone respects and in the art world that's...it's one of the best. (Melanie, SDU)

...I didn't go to one of the universities I would have liked to have gone to. I went to Kenton, which was fine and it all worked out... But it...I always felt like I wanted to go to a slightly better university. So I was like this is my opportunity now to go somewhere that has this reputation (Jean, SDU)

Intrinsic rationale for pathway choice

Some respondents had come to their decisions about which HEI provider for sometimes less extrinsic reasons. Susan had chosen School Direct Unsalaried because it offered her a chance to train to teach where she lived but she had also considered who she would be working with in her chosen University. Like Jean, she was attracted to what she saw as a high status provider and one where a certain philosophy and ethos would be being promoted through the work of a highly respected academic in her field.

I'd looked at...I'd looked at where was best for RE. I knew I didn't want to study at certain places because they had a history of being religiously related to like particular denominations or faiths... But I didn't want that so I wanted somewhere that was quite objective. I'd read a lot of (named) researcher's work and... so then that made my university like my first... my first real choice. (Susan, SDU)

However, when it came to reasons for choosing to become a teacher through the traditional university-based route (PGCE), participants who chose this pathway produced a persuasive set of arguments for their choice. For

example, Kathy could have applied for School Direct but decided to take up a PGCE place at a University.

So I was aware that because I was a bit older that maybe a School Direct programme would be more appropriate because it, sort of, attracted career changers rather than people fresh out of university. But I was quite keen to do university-based training. I think because I'm quite academically inclined I thought it would make it more interesting, the course.....but I was aware that I wouldn't want to just train in one setting, I wanted to see different practices. The PGCE offers that because you have more than one placement, whereas a School Direct course you're much more tied to a school and their way of doing things. So I just thought it would make me a better, maybe more critical teacher if I trained through a university and saw multiple settings. (Kathy, PGCE).

Pierre, a PGCE student, believed that studying to teach at a University was going to be a better route for him. He argued that school-based training was perhaps more to do with covering classes rather than helping develop the good teacher:

The university's mission is to produce outstanding teachers, the best they can be. School based training has other priorities which lead to students being put in front of a class without the security of support enjoyed by PGCE students.

As will be evident from the data deployed so far our respondents did not have one sole reason for choosing to become a teacher on a certain route; their rationales were frequently multifaceted which is why we describe a 'portfolio of choice' in relation to their rationales for choosing. What was evident was that all our respondents had powerful intrinsic reasons for choosing to teach more generally – reasons that are well documented in the research literature on becoming a teacher (Richardson and Watt, 2005; Manuel and Hughes, 2006).

Experiencing their Pathway

Most people believed that they had selected the most appropriate route for themselves. Their arguments were based on a combination of practical considerations and intrinsic motivations to do with teaching – as well as perhaps a degree of post-hoc rationalisation. The majority of our participants had a family member who worked in education and a good proportion of them had also worked in a school so they had a realistic appreciation of what was involved. Those doing SDU made the point that, in reality the differences between the pathways were slight. In some cases they said there were no differences between following SDU and the PGCE as they were following the PGCE pathway full time. They argued that they had the best of both worlds because they could choose their college provider and choose their schools. Those on the university PGCE however tended to privilege their pathway as being a premier route into teaching; their point was that their pathway was about becoming a good teacher for *any* school whereas School Direct was more focused on the needs of the school where the trainee was placed.

Nearly all of our School Direct participants, both salaried and unsalaried, appreciated the extended time they spent in school arguing that it did indeed provide them with additional opportunity to become involved in the life of the school and to get to know their classes very well.

I think because you're placed somewhere for a whole year you're able to build up a rapport with the students. And speaking to other people on the course who had to leave their schools at Christmas, I can't imagine having left my school at Christmas. I think I'd sort of almost cracked it by Christmas and I felt like they were my kids then and so to leave then I think I would have found really difficult. (Saif, SDS)

I think a September start point and being there the whole way through really helps with that as well, so that's a definite advantage. I've got

such a bond with the girls now and they're so...we just know each other, they know my yes and my no and they know what's acceptable and what isn't, they know when we work, when we joke. (Susan, SDU)

Being thrown in at the 'deep end' was viewed by many participants as the best way to learn the necessary practical skills to teach. The majority of our participants, irrespective of chosen pathway, understood and appreciated the support they received from their teacher mentors who they viewed as excellent practitioners. Furthermore, they regarded their relationship with their mentors as pivotal to their success or failure as classroom teachers. Jean (SDU) put it like this:

My mentors in school have been amazing. I know other people have had not so good experiences with their school mentors, but mine have just been willing to help me with anything.....And so, from that respect, I feel like I've been really, really lucky because, the way that she taught has definitely influenced me.

Pascal made it perfectly clear:

So the strength with (my school) I would say, is my mentor. He actually did a GTP (Graduate Teaching Programme), another school based route) a couple of...well, you know, six or seven years ago, so he understands the, kind of, the process from that perspective and training from that way. And also is a Head of Department at the school and, you know, and he kind of has been incredibly supportive and especially from subject knowledge and, kind of, his understanding of drama has been really, really helpful. And that's, that's something that's been strong throughout. (Pascal, SDU)

The vision of teaching as a craft skill (Gove, 2010) learnt by observing 'good' teachers would seemingly have real purchase for Pascal, Jean and Susan. However other School Direct participants who were with the same teacher for almost the whole year argued that this relationship could be difficult and

challenging. Vicky's relationship with her class teacher, whom she recognised as an 'excellent teacher', was fraught and led her to consider withdrawing from the course halfway through the year.

I almost gave up at Christmas ... I had my class teacher; she wasn't really the best. She's a great teacher but I think she's just got her, you know, she's just looking for headship, that's where she wants to go, she's just trying to work her way up and that's all she cared about. And she liked things done a very specific way, so I did find it quite difficult working with her. (Vicky, SDS).

Melanie felt at a complete loss from the outset of her course,

...the first week I was in my school they put me in a class, I was teaching two double lessons I'd never taught in my life and they just left me in there on my own without even another teacher in the room and this happened very early, the first week, ...you're supposed to observe for the whole first half term or, you know, at least two...at least two weeks or something you're supposed to observe the classes that you will go on to teach. (SDU)

The traditional PGCE participants also acknowledged the critical role that mentors play in their feelings of success or failure. Kathy experienced a difficult and tense relationship with her class teacher and was fortunate that a Deputy Head in her school had taken on the role of mentor.

We had a mentor in school, who wasn't my class teacher, she was the deputy head, and she was brilliant, really supportive and she observed me a lot as well. So she was involved in my training but she wasn't the teacher I worked with every day. And I felt like she had a much better understanding of what was expected of us and what the course looked like through the year. (Kathy, PGCE)

Anna, another PGCE student, experienced a difficult second placement and was the only student in her particular school. She summed up how a lack of support could result in a lack of success as well as feelings of isolation.

The success of your School experience depends so heavily on the support you get from the school and class teacher....I was lonely in school.

Morgan et al's (2010) study produced similar findings to suggest that negative events at the micro level of the classroom impinge strongly on new teachers motivations to teach, New teachers need regular, positive 'sustaining events' to support their progression and retention too.

The Perception of the Role of the University

Encouragement and professional development were not just related to trainee-mentor relationships, important as these were. Those participants who had chosen the PGCE pathway spoke of the importance of the university aspect of the course in becoming reflective and thoughtful teachers.

I started this course here so I just... I, sort of, knew instantly really that I wanted to be with a person who believed in creativity. And since being with her as well like, I feel I really identify myself with her in that we believe in, like, social justice and we've got sort of the same principles. (Paulina, PGCE)

I'm kind of academic and I really like the lecture side of things and... yeah, I just wanted the university exactly, really, rather than being thrown into it. I wanted to be able to talk and discuss. (Kathy, PGCE)

Others on the School Direct route who appreciated the university sessions they attended, were keen to get back to school to continue with their classroom practice. As Claudine (SDS) said:

There were quite a few sessions you don't want to miss... the problem is you don't want to be in university too long because then... you need to kind of put all your practice into, you know, into schools.

There could be tensions between the timing of aspects of the programme and the school-based element. Laura (SDS) stated that the university element of School Direct was:

rubbish, everything was a bit too late. They only did lesson planning in November and I'd been planning since September.

This disconnect was echoed by Saif (SDS) who maintained that with School Direct:

(we) kind of got to know the school way before everyone else did, whereas when I was coming into university sessions, a lot of the students hadn't even gone to the schools yet and were way behind us.

However, most of the participants from all of the pathways saw the University-based part of the programme as valuable. As Jean (SDU) put it, 'I felt there was still a lot for me to learn... I needed to learn that I was willing to forfeit the money for that year'. What was evident across all the interviews was that the trainees had made their choices for various personal reasons that fitted with their lives and they were generally happy with their experiences. Where things went wrong, difficulties tended to be related to inter-personal and situationally specific problems rather than the pathways they had selected.

Who is in the lead?

The constantly changing ITE policy landscape has blurred the roles and influence of the participating HEI with that of the school. With the increased emphasis on practical skills and school-based training, HEI's input into

Teacher education is being reduced as schools take more responsibility for the training of teachers (Horden, 2014). This has tilted the balance of power between the HEI's and schools. The shift towards more learning on the job has recast the school/University partnership in a somewhat ambivalent relationship, sometimes creating tensions, which the trainees have to manage. For example, Melanie's narrative demonstrates this tension clearly when she describes the failed negotiation that took place between her university and her school:

They made it very clear that my university was meddling in their system, that this is the way they do it and they're perfectly within their rights to do it this way. They said, you need to be in the classroom as soon as possible and that the only way you learn is this. And at the time it caused me a lot of stress because I felt like the two bodies were not communicating with each other. I spoke to my university and they were like up in arms about it and then they spoke to each other, I think the University and my School had correspondence, but that the school refused to change their policy on it or whatever and then communication really broke down between the two bodies.

Those of our participants who were on the School Direct Salaried route reported that they were at times considered to be employees of the school and this may have led to a different kind of relationship being constructed between them and their schools. Pascal (SDU) put it like this:

So am I a University student or am I the school's student? And I think a couple of timetabling things and a couple of kind of training days have overlapped because my school felt I was theirs and my university felt I was theirs. So there have been a couple of things where I've sort of felt like, "Oh, I don't know," and I'm a little bit in the middle.

But this was not unique to SD trainees. Kathy (PGCE) had also experienced some conflict between the demands of her HEI and her school and described some of the tensions in the following way;

... different training days and things that the university had organised, because they'd (the school) kind of banked on you being in school as a member of staff. They were quite funny about things like us having days out to do training and that shouldn't really have happened because you weren't a member of staff.

In contrast, Saif (SDS) reported that he sometimes felt a little bit neglected by his university tutors who, he believed, didn't engage with SD trainees in the same way as they did with PGCE students, saying that the HEI staff were happy to leave arrangements to the school:

The tutors know a lot more about the university students than they know about the School Direct students. They're kind of more familiar with those students (PGCE). Whereas, with School Direct, they know that, oh, your mentor is obviously arranging it. It's almost like your school's arranging it so, you know, it's fine.

These data suggest that the exact nature of the partnership between the HEI and the school is uncertain. Pascal, Kathy and Saif offer three different versions of 'who was the lead' in their training and all experienced some tensions between which demands should be paramount. Pascal (SDU) was torn between the demands of the School and those of the university who, he felt, both claimed ownership of him. Kathy on a university based PCGE felt it to be wrong for the school to expect her to prioritise their expectations whilst Saif (SDS) simply felt abandoned by the University. However, where a school rejects the historical role of the university, support for the partnership is undermined which leaves students like Melanie unhappy and ultimately floundering.

Nevertheless despite the tensions, the sometimes ambivalent relationships and uncertainty that our participants reported regarding who was in the lead in their training, most said they had a positive year. As Jean (SDU) said, 'even with all the highs and with all the lows, there was still definitely more highs

than there were lows', whilst Paulina (PGCE) maintained 'overall it's been like just... it's been really, really great. And I do feel very lucky to have been given such great placements as well.'

The current concern to foreground teaching as a craft rather than a theoretically inflected professional qualification ultimately moves HEI's away as first providers. However, what our data illustrates from the user perspective of our trainee participants, including many of those on School Direct programmes, is that there is still a respect for the contribution that is being made by these institutions. Our participants were in some cases prepared to "forfeit the money for that year" in order to access the contribution from their chosen institution. Simultaneously, they valued their school experiences where these were seen to be related to their professional development and not simply the specific staffing needs of the school in which they were placed. The most powerful response from our participants was that when professional, supportive and sensitive relations were established between all of the participants and stakeholders in the enterprise of becoming a teacher, then any limits of or shortcomings in any pathway were always going to be easier to overcome. And there was a recognition by all that becoming a teacher is indeed a composite of skills, dispositions, experience and knowledge but it is also a process that involves much more as our participants' stories have demonstrated.

Conclusion

At the start of this paper, drawing on Cochran-Smith's work (2005), we argued that the ITE 'policy problem' was being constructed around concerns about teacher quality as well as the 'crisis' in recruitment. While we are not able to comment on whether pathway diversity has of itself raised teacher quality, it is clear from our small sample, and from larger studies, that diversity of pathways into teaching has allowed some individuals to enter the profession who might not otherwise have been able to access training. This was the case with those of our sample who participated on the SDS pathway.

The participants in our small study were pleased to be able to have some agency in their choice-making of institution and schools that fitted with their personal commitments. They all valued their connection with their HEI (albeit for different reasons). They all recognized the power of good mentoring - even where they did not think they had received this in their placement schools. It was not the specific pathway that concerned them, as they were, in the main, pleased with their choices. Where tensions existed, these were attributed to individual in-school difficulties that could occur regardless of pathway. None of our participants talked about in-HEI tensions – but this might have been because of our roles. However, tensions between ‘who was in charge’ were sometimes less amenable to resolution.

In their study on School Direct, Brown et al (2015, p.23) pointed out that this pathway provides powerful opportunities for HEIs and schools ‘to think creatively about how to develop understandings of pedagogy and the relationship between theory and practice’. They added that this process would involve revisiting and reworking assumptions about roles and responsibilities; something that was not always clear to the participants in our small study. Our participants regarded their school-based experience as a critical part of becoming a teacher as well as valuing the contribution made by HEIs. What they needed was an active partnership between the two settings, synthesising the different experiences, expertise and insights from both partners in order to support the range of ITE pathways and different trainee needs. As with McIntyre et al’s (2017) arguments, the trainees did not want to be considered as employees of an organization per se; rather they wanted assurance that their pedagogical learning would have wider resonance beyond the one-school setting. As (Maguire: 2014) has argued;

In all this rush to reform, there are a number of dangers. One is the way in which individualism may triumph over concerns for the common good. Will the training schools be preparing teachers for all schools and all children, or just for their own? Localism may cost us dear!

While it is not possible to come to any firm conclusions on the basis of our small exploratory study, two points are worth returning to. First, English reforms to ITE are currently characterised by flexibility, deregulation and perhaps a degree of fragmentation and instrumentalism (the pressure to recruit teachers to shortage subjects). This pressure has been reflected in even more policy reforms to English ITE to increase trainee recruitment (Foster, 2018). Therefore, it does not seem likely in the short-term that there will be any return to a more systematic form of provision. The longer-term question is what diversity and flexibility might mean in terms of teacher quality; a question for further research. Second, in this paper we have turned our attention towards those on the receiving end of policy (Ball et al. 2012). From what we have reported in this paper, refining school-HEI partnerships and reforming ITE should involve listening to the voices of, and attending to the experiences of, trainee-teachers who have a powerful stake in this provision. This 'listening' needs to extend far beyond the bureaucratic tick list approach that characterises trainee course assessment. If we are serious about providing quality teacher education, wherever it is based, then one good place to start is by listening to those who are learning how to be teachers themselves and taking their views seriously.

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Table 1. Participants -

| Pathway | Trainee | Subject |
|---------------------------------------|----------------|--------------------------|
| <i>School Direct Salaried</i> | Laura | Science |
| | Claudine | Mathematics |
| | Vicky | P.E. |
| | Saif | Modern Foreign Languages |
| <i>School Direct Unsalared</i> | Susan | Religious Education |
| | Melanie | Art |
| | Jean | Science |
| | Pascal | Modern Foreign Languages |
| <i>University based PGCE</i> | Anna | Mathematics |
| | Kathy | English |
| | Paulina | Modern Foreign Languages |
| | Pierre | Modern Foreign Languages |